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New York

President:	Mr. Rugunda	(Uganda)
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	Libyan Arab Jamahiriya	Mr. Gebreel
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	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Turkey	Mr. Dizdar
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Williams
	United States of America	Mr. Gordon
	Viet Nam	Mr. Bui The Giang

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting resumed at 3.20 p.m.

The President: I wish to remind all speakers, as I indicated at the morning session, to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously. Delegations with lengthy statements are kindly requested to circulate the texts in writing and to deliver a condensed version when speaking in the Chamber.

I now give the floor to the representative of Egypt.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt): I have the pleasure to address the Security Council on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and to start by expressing the Movement's appreciation for the briefing presented today by Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, which remains one of the most important tools for assessing the situation on the ground and for addressing efforts aimed at advancing the peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The situation in the Middle East, which has deteriorated as a result of the ongoing unlawful Israeli occupation of the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories since 1967, continues to be a matter of serious concern not only to the region, but to the entire international community.

The Non-Aligned Movement regrets the lack of progress made, despite increased efforts at the international and regional levels, in achieving a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East on the basis of the two-State solution, the Madrid terms of reference, the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1373 (2001), 1515 (2003) and 1850 (2008). That lack of progress is due to Israel's continued violations of international law, including international humanitarian and human rights laws, and its rejection of all calls to cease its flagrant violations and to pursue negotiations in good faith on all tracks of the peace process.

Israel, the occupying Power, obstructs efforts to resume peace negotiations by its violations of the human rights of the Palestinian people, including their humiliation on a daily basis, in addition to its constant actions aimed at imposing unilateral solutions by illegally creating new facts on the ground aimed at altering the demographic composition, status and character of the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Israel does not refrain from taking measures that prejudice the outcome of negotiations on final-status issues, namely Jerusalem, settlements, the refugees, borders, security and water. Such illegal measures deepen mistrust, provoke further tension, prevent real progress and raise real doubts as to Israel's credibility as a partner in the peace process.

In the West Bank, Israel continues its illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, intensifying its confiscation of Palestinian land, expansion of settlements and transfer of settlers, construction of the wall and other destructive measures, including the demolition of more Palestinian homes, in an attempt to, de facto, annex more Palestinian land. All of that is being done in grave breach of international law and United Nations resolutions, as well as Israel's commitments under the Road Map, which clearly calls for a freeze of all Israeli settlement activities, including natural growth, and the dismantlement of all outposts established since March 2001.

Israel has failed to commit to a freeze on all settlement activities and continues to defy the international consensus in that regard. The international community, including the Security Council, must use all practical means and tools available under the Charter and international law to take the necessary measures to compel or to bring Israel into compliance. The Non-Aligned Movement expresses deep concern regarding the extensive damage caused by the Israeli settlements, the wall and the spread of checkpoints, which are severing the Palestinian territories into separate cantons, isolating East Jerusalem, undermining the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the Palestinian territory, and jeopardizing the prospects for achieving the two-State solution.

Further, the unresolved crisis in Gaza continues to have negative repercussions on all efforts to advance the peace process and wreaks unacceptable havoc on the fabric of society and civilian life in Gaza. Israel continues to impose a blockade on the Palestinian civilian population, to deprive them of their humanitarian needs and to prevent Gaza's reconstruction, in violation of international

humanitarian law and United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel lift immediately its illegal blockade by allowing for the immediate and sustained opening of all border crossings to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and to realize the urgent early recovery and reconstruction of Gaza. The Non-Aligned Movement also believes that there is no legal, political or moral justification for the Israeli imprisonment of the Palestinian population in Gaza and calls for the end of such unlawful collective punishment.

Turning to Lebanon, the Non-Aligned Movement remains deeply concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), and calls on Israel to withdraw fully from the remaining Lebanese occupied land in the Sheba'a farms, the Kfar Shouba Hills and the northern part of al-Ghajar village.

Concerning the occupied Syrian Golan, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms that all measures and actions taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, to alter the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan and its institutional structure, as well as the Israeli measures to impose jurisdiction and administration there, are null and void and have no legal effect. The Non-Aligned Movement demands that Israel abide by Security Council resolution 497 (1981) and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967, in implementation also of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

International determination to work towards achieving peace in the Middle East and ensuring that commitments made are commitments monitored and kept is stronger today than ever before. The Arab side has reiterated time after time the readiness and willingness for peace, as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative, based on the concept of full land for full peace. It is now the responsibility of Israel to seize the opportunity to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace by stopping its illegal settlement activities, bringing an end to its 42-year occupation and clearly committing to the two-State solution, to be achieved peacefully through negotiations on all core issues on the basis of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. In that regard, the Non-Aligned Movement reaffirms its firm commitment to continue to support and to contribute to all efforts aimed at achieving peace in the Middle East.

(*spoke in Arabic*)

I shall now speak in my national capacity. Egypt is participating in the efforts to relaunch the peace process, which, regrettably, are countered by continuing Israeli rejection of the requirements for peace, primarily the full cessation of all settlement activities, in accordance with the commitments under the Road Map. Israel's escalation of its settlement policy, particularly in and around East Jerusalem, does not serve the goals of peace, but seeks to change the realities on the ground and to create a new reality to prejudge the final-status negotiations, hoping that the international community will stand silent in the face of attempts to seize Palestinian territory and to annex it de facto. However, the international community as a whole stands against Israel's settlement policies and is aware of its real endeavours and rejects them.

In this context, Egypt warns of the consequences of settlement and so-called natural growth activities, which not only hinder efforts to relaunch the peace process, but are also aimed at undermining the contiguity of the Palestinian territories and at obliterating the chances of achieving an international solution based on the existence of two States along the lines of the 1967 borders. Those activities call into question the credibility of the Israeli Government's commitment to the peace process, in particular because they directly contradict the main principle upon which the process was established — the principle of land for peace.

Egypt warns against Israel's intensifying endeavours to alter the features of occupied East Jerusalem and to separate it from its Arab and Palestinian surroundings through the confiscation and demolition of Palestinian homes and the construction of new settlement units, including the planned construction of 20 new housing units in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood. Israel has also attempted to violate the sanctity of Islamic holy shrines in the city by issuing statements that Jerusalem, including all of its neighbourhoods, is the united capital of Israel. All of those actions clearly contradict United Nations resolutions repudiating all of Israel's attempts to annex East Jerusalem and declaring them null and void.

At the same time, international endeavours to attain a just and agreed solution to the long-term

refugee problem must be intensified. Israel has tried to skirt that issue, in particular through recent increased talk within the Israeli Government of the concept of a Jewish State. Such talk has a negative impact on the entire Arab population of the occupied Palestinian territories.

Today more than ever, the international community must work to end Israel's violations and to compel it to comply with its obligations to protect Palestinian civilians and to work to promote peace and security in the Middle East.

Egypt encourages the efforts of the United States Government and welcomes the sincere desire of its President to work towards a comprehensive peace in the Middle East by ending settlement activity and enshrining an objective vision of a two-State solution. Egypt also supports the efforts of the international Quartet, which has sent a clear message of solidarity with the two-State solution and supports the convening of a meeting in Moscow later this year to follow up on the implementation of the Annapolis process. Egypt will spare no effort to achieve Palestinian reconciliation through the Cairo dialogue leading to the reunification of the Palestinian people in the West Bank and Gaza, under the legitimate leadership of the Palestinian Authority represented by President Abbas.

Egypt is also working on arrangements to allow the sustainable opening of the Gaza crossing points based on the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, an end to the collective punishment by Israel of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, and the honest and full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009).

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Switzerland.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank you, Sir, for this opportunity to state my country's views on the situation in the Middle East. I will confine myself to a few aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I welcome and thank Mr. Fernandez-Taranco for his very relevant briefing this morning.

Switzerland is deeply concerned about the current humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. The recent war and its severe consequences have made the living conditions in that tiny and densely populated territory increasingly precarious. Those consequences have confronted the international community with a real emergency situation. The near impossibility of providing people with their basic needs, the lack of electricity, the limited supply of drinking water and the serious breakdown of the sewage treatment system are all causes for alarm.

Switzerland recalls that, in conformity with the obligations of international humanitarian law, Israel, as the occupying Power, must ensure access for humanitarian organizations to the civilian population and the supply of basic necessities. Sixty years after the adoption of the Geneva Conventions, respect for international humanitarian law remains our best response to the needs of the victims.

While respecting Israel's security imperatives, Switzerland believes that a concerted effort must be made to establish a mechanism to ensure humanitarian access and reconstruction. Such a mechanism — the development of which is called for in resolution 1860 (2009) — should be based on the framework for the provision of minimum humanitarian assistance to Gaza, proposed by the United Nations, and be coordinated by a technical committee providing for substantial and sustainable humanitarian access. Its frame of reference should be the four principles established by humanitarian practice and endorsed by the international community in the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit: humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence.

Under the auspices of the United Nations, that neutral, independent and international body should ensure the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip and establish a mechanism to monitor the importation of goods. Switzerland is willing to contribute to the establishment of such a body.

In the follow-up to a conflict, fact-finding missions to investigate allegations of violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law are a necessity for the victims. We believe that such missions ultimately help to bring about a lasting settlement to the conflict in question and contribute to preventing future violations. To achieve these two objectives, they must operate on the basis of a balanced mandate that takes into account the concerns of all the parties to a conflict as well as all kinds of violation.

That is the intention of the Goldstone mission, which was mandated by the Human Rights Council. We await with interest its report on the alleged

violations committed by all parties to the conflict. It will then be necessary to determine the appropriate follow-up to the report.

We welcome the renewed commitment of the international community, in particular of the American administration, to actively promoting a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Peace Initiative of the Arab League and the determination of the State of Israel to achieve a lasting peace with its neighbours are encouraging signs. It is therefore essential that the international community be actively involved in helping put an end to that agonizing conflict.

The parameters of a settlement are already well known. A total freeze on the expansion of all settlements is a decisive factor for guaranteeing the peace process. The destruction in East Jerusalem of Palestinian houses situated near the old city and the planned eviction of Palestinian families must not happen. At the same time and in order to launch a genuine political process, it is essential to renounce violence. The halt to the rocket attacks against the Israeli civilian population must be maintained.

Switzerland is convinced that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved by military means. The Clinton parameters, the Taba discussions and the Geneva initiative clearly indicate the path towards a solution. The creation of a viable Palestinian State living side by side with the State of Israel, existing within secure and internationally recognized borders, is therefore the only path that can lead to a lasting settlement of the conflict.

To conclude, I wish to stress the urgency and importance of creating a mechanism for humanitarian access and reconstruction in Gaza. We are counting on the support of the Security Council in this process and on the active participation of the Member States concerned and the relevant entities of the United Nations system.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Brazil.

Ms. Cordeiro Dunlop (Brazil): I congratulate you on your timely decision to hold an open debate on the situation in the Middle East. The press has followed suit, as today's issue of a local newspaper shows on its front page. The format you have chosen vastly enhances the relevance and impact of the monthly briefings to the Security Council, as the wider membership is given an opportunity to convey its views on a subject of such importance. I also thank Assistant Secretary-General Oscar Fernandez-Taranco for his very comprehensive briefing.

More than seven months have passed since the ceasefire was agreed in the Gaza Strip, but the humanitarian situation there continues to be a source of grave concern. Access to basic goods remains clearly insufficient, and much-needed reconstruction has not been started due to the lack of building materials. The relative tranquillity that we currently observe in the Strip should not lead us to overlook the continued plight of its inhabitants. Behind the statistics of the Gaza war earlier this year, there are real men, women and children. They no longer suffer daily bombardments, but are still forced to live in entirely unacceptable conditions.

Brazil therefore reiterates the urgency of an international effort geared both at reconstructing Gaza and at meeting all the humanitarian needs of its population. Israel must fully abide by the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access and keep the border crossings open. At the same time, militant groups in Gaza must keep up the restraint they have shown recently and refrain from all acts of violence against the Israeli civilian population, especially in the southern areas.

With regard to the West Bank, we can only express satisfaction with recent Israeli efforts to ease movement and improve access to Israel. Such measures are positive and must continue. However, more is needed. It is crucial that Israel freeze all settlement activities, including those undertaken to accommodate natural growth, and dismantle the existing ones, mainly those built after 2000. This aspect is particularly relevant in East Jerusalem, where attempts to redraw the demographic map only further complicate an already very difficult situation. The construction of the wall — found to be illegal by an advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice — must also come to a halt.

We need to foster social and economic development throughout the occupied Palestinian territories, while providing ways to defuse tension and lessen dissatisfaction with the limited possibilities of everyday life. In this sense, Brazil is making a contribution. We are currently building a sports centre

in Ramallah, together with our partners in the India-Brazil-South Africa forum, and will bring two of the most prestigious Brazilian soccer teams to play for peace. Our experience has shown that sport is a useful instrument for creating hope and opportunities in impoverished areas.

In the diplomatic arena, there seem to be promising developments. The early and active involvement of the United States in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its continued support for the two-State solution are very welcome. Prime Minister Netanyahu's openness to the idea of a Palestinian State is also encouraging, although it must evolve in order to recognize the need to endow Palestine with the attributes of full statehood. If these promising signs are to bear the hoped-for fruit, sustained political will and true statesmanship will continue to be required.

This holds true for Palestinians as well. Brazil commends Egypt's efforts to promote intra-Palestinian reconciliation, but if they are to succeed all parties must work in earnest to find common ground under the leadership of the Palestinian Authority. On the ability to overcome internal differences rests the possibility of building a truly independent and prosperous Palestinian State. History will not forgive those who fail to compromise in the search for unity, since without unity there can be no peace.

Brazil supports the 26 June declaration by the Quartet on the resumption of negotiations to end the conflict and reach a two-State solution based on the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, the Madrid terms of reference, the Road Map and all previous agreements. Such a solution is needed today, not tomorrow. As Minister Celso Amorim said in the Cairo conference on Gaza in February, it is time for peace, not for a peace process.

Such views were also conveyed to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Israel, Mr. Avigdor Lieberman, last week in Brazil. His visit was an expression of the productive bilateral relationship that exists between our two countries. It also provides evidence of my Government's willingness to contribute as much as possible to the achievement of a comprehensive peace. To the same end, the Brazilian Special Envoy to the Middle East, Ambassador Ouro-Preto, recently concluded another tour of the region during which, in a wide range of meetings, he expressed yet again Brazil's support for peace and the promotion of mutual understanding.

In the same spirit, the Brazilian Government, together with the United Nations Department of Public Information, has organized the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East under the theme "Promoting Israeli-Palestinian Dialogue — a view from South America", being held today and tomorrow in Rio de Janeiro. This event is bringing together politicians, journalists, intellectuals and members of civil society groups from Israel, Palestine, Brazil and other South American countries. The seminar is a gesture that embodies the spirit of openness and dialogue that needs to be taken up in the political and diplomatic arenas.

There are approximately 7 million Brazilians of Lebanese descent. It is therefore no surprise that we follow developments in that fellow country very closely. We congratulate the Lebanese political parties on their conduct of the recent elections and encourage them to continue the dialogue to form a broad-based and stable Government. We are particularly encouraged by the tireless efforts of President Sleiman to build trust among the main political forces in the country and thereby consolidate stability.

The arms cache recently discovered in southern Lebanon constitutes a clear violation of resolution 1701 (2006). It is crucial that all parties, without exception, abide by the terms of the resolution. It is also essential that all parties fully cooperate with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon in the investigation of the incident.

My delegation believes that conditions more favourable than those of the recent past are being established to foster significant progress towards a solution to the conflict in the Middle East. They present an opportunity we must not miss. Brazil is willing and ready to do all in its power to help the parties.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Indonesia.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): Let me first express the appreciation of my delegation to you, Sir, for convening this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine. We also wish to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, for his

briefing on the latest developments in the region. In making this statement, Indonesia associates itself with the statement delivered by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The Council's debate today provides yet another vivid reminder of the continuing hardships prevalent in the occupied Palestinian territory and, not least, of the paucity of progress in the implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions.

Like others, Indonesia remains profoundly concerned by the depth of the humanitarian crisis that continues to permeate the Gaza Strip following the Israeli attacks of December 2008 and January 2009. While the worst of the military action may have stopped, the flow of food, medicine and reconstruction material allowed into Gaza remains grossly inadequate. The international community cannot allow that situation to continue. It must continue to speak as one in demanding that Israel open the border crossings to Gaza in order to allow reconstruction efforts and access to much-needed humanitarian supplies to ease the humanitarian crisis.

The litany of Israeli illegal practices is well chronicled. Few, however, are as great an affront to the prospects of peace and as great a hurdle to the peace process as its illegal settlement practices. Israel continues to build and expand illegal settlements, in the process demolishing Palestinian homes and other structures, confiscating lands and imposing checkpoints that arbitrarily restrict the movement of Palestinians. Despite the repeated protests of the international community, Israel persists in its efforts to change the character and legal status of East Jerusalem.

Indonesia once again condemns those settlement policies, which gravely undermine the contiguity, integrity, viability and unity of the occupied Palestinian territory and jeopardize the prospects for achieving the two-State solution for peace on the basis of the pre-1967 borders through the establishment of a sovereign, independent State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.

While Israel persists in its illegal settlement activities, Indonesia is encouraged by the ever-strengthening international consensus rejecting those activities and demanding an immediate halt to and the dismantling of those settlements.

Indeed, while Israel remains deaf to the international exhortation to live up to its commitment to a two-State solution to the conflict, Indonesia draws encouragement from a number of recent significant developments. First, there is a renewed sense of urgency in the intra-Palestinian reconciliation talks, facilitated by the Government of Egypt. We wish to underscore the importance of making progress in those efforts, which are aimed at promoting Palestinian unity.

Secondly, there has been a practical demonstration of the commitment of the international community to the cause of peace in Palestine through pledges of material assistance, as evidenced at the International Conference on the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 2 March 2009.

Thirdly, there has been a stepping up of diplomatic activity with the objective of restarting negotiations. In that regard, we acknowledge in particular the vigorous efforts being made by the United States and the continued engagement of the Quartet.

Indonesia, for its part, remains consistent in calling for a settlement based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative. Our support of statehood for Palestine is steadfast — statehood, we wish to emphasize, with all its attributes.

A truly comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East requires not only a solution to the question of Palestine, but also progress on the Israel-Lebanon and Israel-Syria tracks. In that connection, we continue to demand that Israel comply with the relevant Security Council resolutions and withdraw fully from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. Similarly, we continue to be concerned by Israel's ongoing air and land violations of Lebanon's sovereignty, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006), and we call on Israel to withdraw completely from the remaining Lebanese occupied land.

The President: I now call on the representative of Sweden.

Mr. Lidén (Sweden): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. In addition, the following countries align themselves with this statement: Turkey, Croatia, the former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Iceland and Ukraine.

Developments over the past year have made it abundantly clear that we must move swiftly towards a renewal of the peace process in the Middle East. The European Union remains committed to a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict on the basis of international law; the relevant Security Council resolutions; the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, including land for peace; the Road Map; the agreements previously reached by the parties; and the Annapolis process, as well as the Arab Peace Initiative. We remain equally committed to the two-State solution, with an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian State, comprising the West Bank and Gaza, living side by side in peace and security with the State of Israel.

We welcome the United States Administration's commitment to pursue vigorously a two-State solution and a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. The European Union is ready to work with the parties to the conflict, as well as with the United States, other Quartet members and Arab partners, to achieve that goal.

Both parties must now take concrete measures to resume peace negotiations, respecting previous agreements and understandings.

The continued settlement activities, house demolitions and evictions in the occupied Palestinian territories, including in East Jerusalem, remain a serious concern for the European Union. We urge the Government of Israel to immediately end those settlement activities, including so-called natural growth, and to dismantle all outposts erected since March 2001. The European Union reiterates that the settlements are illegal under international law and constitute an obstacle to peace. If there is to be genuine peace, a way must be found to share Jerusalem as the capital of two States. The European Union will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders other than those agreed by both parties.

A durable solution to the Gaza crisis has to be achieved through the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The European Union remains gravely concerned at the humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for the immediate and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza. Reconstruction and economic recovery have to be allowed, and the current humanitarian crisis must be resolved.

All violence must stop, including rocket attacks on Israel. An effective mechanism to prevent the smuggling of arms and ammunition into the Gaza Strip should be put in place. We call on those holding the abducted Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit to release him without delay.

We call upon the Government of Israel to work unequivocally towards the two-State solution. The European Union welcomes the initial step, announced by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, of commitment to a peace that would include a Palestinian State.

We call upon the Palestinian Authority to continue to make every effort to improve law and order in territories under its control, and we welcome steps taken so far. All parties must stop incitement and violence against civilians, and respect for international humanitarian law and human rights must be ensured. The European Union will continue to follow closely investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

The European Union calls upon the Palestinians to step up the intra-Palestinian reconciliation efforts in support of President Mahmoud Abbas. We support the mediation by Egypt and the Arab League. Palestinians should quickly overcome their divisions and find common ground on the basis of non-violence, with a view to preserving the prospects for the creation of a future State. Reconciliation will facilitate the reconstruction in Gaza and the organization of elections.

The European Union will promote Palestinian State-building and intensify work in partnership with the Palestinian Authority on reforms. The efforts of the Palestinian Authority to develop an effective and reformed security sector are positive. We will cooperate towards additional improvement. Civilian police and the judicial sector will continue to be a focus of European Union support.

The declared readiness of the Government of Israel to promote Palestinian economic development is a positive sign. This should be carried out within the framework of the broader perspective of the two-State solution. The European Union welcomes the positive

steps recently taken by the Israeli authorities regarding the easing of restrictions on the West Bank. We look forward to further and sustained improvements in movement and access in all of the occupied Palestinian territories. The Agreement on Movement and Access of 2005 must be fully implemented. The European Union is ready to work closely with Israel, the Palestinian Authority and international donors in order to achieve sustainable development of the Palestinian economy.

The European Union will contribute substantially to post-conflict arrangements aimed at ensuring the sustainability of peace agreements, while also addressing the regional economic and security dimensions. We call on all partners in the international community to contribute actively to the achievement of a comprehensive settlement. Arab countries and other partners should be forthcoming, both politically and financially, in assisting the Palestinian Authority. In line with the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative, the European Union invites Israel and all Arab countries to take confidence-building measures in order to stimulate mutual trust and to create an atmosphere conducive to conflict resolution.

A lasting settlement of the conflicts between Israel and Syria and between Israel and Lebanon should be pursued in parallel, creating mutually reinforcing processes. The European Union expects Syria and Israel to resume peace negotiations.

The European Union congratulates the people of Lebanon on the successful holding of parliamentary elections, which is an important step in the democratic development of the country. At the same time and in the light of some worrying recent developments in southern Lebanon, which also affect the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon, the European Union reiterates its call to all the parties to fully abide by and implement the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006).

In the light of further developments at the political level and on the ground, the European Union stands ready to support concrete and early results on the path to a comprehensive settlement of the conflict.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia.

Mr. Zainuddin (Malaysia): The situation in the Middle East, especially the question of Palestine, remains of concern, with no progress or clear view of a durable and lasting peace leading to a two-State solution. It is my delegation's hope that our meeting today will assist in changing this status quo and will enable the relevant parties to re-start negotiations in good faith towards finding a lasting solution to this issue, which has long beleaguered the international community, and more so the Middle East, particularly Palestine. In this regard, we thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting and for giving us this opportunity to participate in this open debate. Allow me to also congratulate you, Sir, for your presidency of the Council for the month of July.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement by Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

For genuine progress to be made on the Middle East peace process, including a resumption of peace negotiations, all parties must demonstrate honesty and sincerity aimed at achieving the objective of a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on a two-State solution, the relevant Security Council resolutions, including 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), and the Arab Peace Initiative. Words must be matched with actions to reflect this genuine desire.

Unfortunately, the negative signals from Israel, from statements by its leaders to actions in the Gaza Strip and inaction on halting illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories, among others, are indicators that Israel is not in any way close to reflecting any intent or desire to find a durable and lasting solution to the Palestinian issue, including a two-State solution. It baffles us all that while, on the one hand, it seems to agree to a two-State solution, on the other hand, illegal Israeli settlements continue to be built in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem. Palestinian lands are also illegally confiscated, including through the building of the separation wall, which continues to be built despite the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice on stopping its construction. Not only has the construction of settlements not been halted and they have not been demolished, there is even a caveat for allowing their expansion due to natural growth. Would not allowing these settlements to expand for natural growth presuppose that these illegal settlements are accepted as a permanent feature in the occupied Palestinian territories? Would not that then violate the various Security Council resolutions that call for Israel to return to the 1967 border and run counter to achieving

a two-State solution and a comprehensive lasting and durable peace?

Clearly the calls by the international community, including by one of the major partners, to stop these illegal settlements has not been heeded. The building of these settlements, let alone their expansion for whatever reasons, violates all international laws and norms and various Council resolutions. We continue to call on Israel to cease constructing these settlements in the occupied land and to return it to the Palestinians. We urge the Council, in particular, to ensure that Israel abides by the relevant Council resolutions in this regard and to desist from changing the facts on the ground.

Despite the almost seven months since the Israeli onslaught on Gaza that saw devastating consequences for the life of the Palestinian people in Gaza and its infrastructure, the humanitarian situation remains dire. Israeli imposed a blockade on Gaza, through access by land, air and sea, perpetually imprisoning the people of Gaza in an open prison and depriving them, especially children, women and the elderly, of daily essentials.

While international efforts are afoot trying to rebuild what was destroyed by Israel, humanitarian aid and personnel continue to be largely restricted from entering Gaza, and in many ways the area is strangled and its inhabitants isolated from the outside world. Such action grossly violates international humanitarian law on ensuring the protection of civilians. In this regard, we again urge the Council to take the necessary action to end this siege on Gaza and to allow the movement of goods, including humanitarian aid, into Gaza. Compensation must also be made to the people in Gaza by those responsible for the casualties and destruction to homes and infrastructure.

The actions by Israel have thus far not reflected a genuine and honest desire to find a just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine based on a two-State solution. All parties must fulfil their roles as honest parties to this peace process, lest we remain in the state we are in now, far from seeing peace in the Middle East and a solution to the Palestinian question. The price for the international community if peace is not achieved is high and higher still for the people in the Middle East, especially the Palestinians.

We urge the Security Council to take the necessary and appropriate action to ensure all parties resume the peace negotiations. On this note also, Malaysia supports the recent proposal by the European Union High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy regarding the need for the Security Council to set a deadline on resolving the question of Palestine and on the eventual creation of a Palestinian State by the United Nations.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Saudi Arabia.

Mr. Al Nafisee (Saudi Arabia): At the outset, I would like to express our appreciation to the Ugandan presidency of the Council for organizing this open debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, and to thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his comprehensive briefing on this issue.

No regional crisis has greater potential to affect other regional conflicts than the Arab-Israeli conflict in Middle East. It has overshadowed and dominated all other issues in the Middle East for the past six decades. This situation has created a climate conducive to the development of extremism and the spread of terrorism, while hampering regional development, modernization and reform.

Saudi Arabia, along with other Arab Governments, has made its commitment to peace loud and clear in the Arab Peace Initiative. We have continued to affirm our commitment to a just and comprehensive peace based on international law.

Unfortunately, on the other side, no reciprocal commitment has yet been forthcoming from Israel. It is very crucial to stress the importance of reviving the peace process and Israeli seriousness and truthfulness towards the peace process, including the immediate cessation of the building of settlements or their expansion.

The status quo in the situation in the city of Gaza is another factor exacerbating the problem in that besieged city. The call on Israel to withdraw its forces from all occupied lands, including the Golan in Syria and the Sheba'a farm lands and Kafr Shouba in Lebanon, must go hand-in-hand with the overall peace plan in the region.

Saudi Arabia welcomes the effort of President Obama's Administration to push for a comprehensive peace plan and the establishment of a sovereign State for the Palestinian people, living side-by-side with the State of Israel.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Jordan.

Mr. Al-Allaf (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would first of all like to thank Assistant Secretary-General Fernandez-Taranco for his briefing this morning.

Jordan associates itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt earlier today on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

During its ministerial meeting held on 11 May (see S/PV.6123), the Security Council sent a clear message to all parties concerned about peace in the Middle East. The Council reiterated the urgent need to restore peace to the region in accordance with the two-State solution and previous agreements and obligations. We are meeting today not just to reiterate the importance of that message, but also to emphasize that, given developments in the region in recent months, now is the appropriate time to achieve tangible and genuine progress in the Arab-Israeli conflict, so as to produce concrete results on the ground. If we let this opportunity pass us by, there will be catastrophic consequences for the region and its peoples, the peace and security of Israelis and Palestinians and international peace and security as a whole.

Finding a just and lasting solution to the Palestinian problem, which is at the heart of the conflict in the Middle East, is the key to the overall solution of other problems in the region. Any solution must be based on Security Council resolutions and the terms of reference adopted at international conferences with regard to the Palestinian problem. In particular, it must be based on resolutions 1850 (2008) and 1860 (2009), which reiterated that an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict could only be based on the two-State solution. We must therefore intensify efforts and embark upon serious Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Those negotiations must take place according to a properly defined timetable and be based on a clear and acceptable plan to achieve a peaceful resolution and ensure security for Israel.

Under the guidance of His Majesty King Abdullah II, Jordan is certainly prepared to make every effort to support that undertaking, so as to launch negotiations to establish a contiguous, viable and independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, in line with agreed international terms of reference and the Arab Peace Initiative, which is the main starting point to deal with the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Now is a good opportunity to do that, given regional and international efforts to find a solution to the conflict in the region. However, Israel is continuing its unilateral policy in an effort to impose a fait accompli on the occupied territories. Israeli plans to establish new settlements, in particular in East Jerusalem, and its expansion of existing settlements, are totally unacceptable. Attempts to create a new situation on the ground clearly violate both international humanitarian law and the commitments that Israel entered into under the Road Map. They also increase tensions in the region and jeopardize the chances of finding a just and lasting solution and for establishing a viable Palestinian State.

If Israel truly wants to demonstrate its sincerity about moving towards peace, it must immediately halt all settlement activity and dismantle all illegal settlement outposts. Israel must not alter East Jerusalem, and must end its policy of Judaizing Al-Quds and changing its historic Islamic character. It must stop its excavations near Al-Haram Al-Sharif and must cease destroying houses and erecting barriers. It must end its confiscation of land and all other acts that could have a negative impact on a peaceful settlement. Such acts also run counter to international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

As a country of the region, we have taken note of the positive impact of President Obama's message delivered in Cairo, in particular as regards the commitment of the United States to a two-State solution, to find comprehensive peace in the Middle East and to improve relations with the Arab and Muslim world. In that regard, Special Envoy George Mitchell is making an effort in the region. It is extremely important to support and build on all such efforts, as well as to give them every chance of success.

In line with its responsibilities under international humanitarian law, the international community must act immediately to halt the ongoing humanitarian suffering of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. That includes lifting the blockade stifling the Palestinian people, who should also be provided with the necessary assistance to address their difficult circumstances, imposed by the occupation. The deteriorating humanitarian situation of Palestinians in

the Gaza Strip is also resulting in increased despair and frustration, both in the region and in the Arab and Muslim world. That will have an impact on security, stability and peace efforts throughout the region.

Under the guidance of King Abdullah II, Jordan will continue to make every possible effort to encourage international stakeholders to end the suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza. Voluntary Jordanian organizations will also continue to deliver the necessary aid to our brothers in the Palestinian territories.

Achieving peace in the Middle East is not just a cherished goal of the countries concerned. That goal has now taken on an international dimension as well, given its impact on international peace and security. Resolving the conflict will be to the benefit of all parties, and of the entire international community. We must seize this historic opportunity to achieve peace in the region, for the region must have peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Morocco.

Mr. Loulichki (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I should like to express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for allowing us to participate in today's debate on the situation in the Middle East.

Despite the passage of years, the succession of Governments, the plethora of initiatives and the deep and unprecedented changes in international relations, the Palestinian situation and the Middle East crisis continue unchanged, awaiting a comprehensive and just settlement and the realization of hopes and aspirations for stability, security and cooperation.

All relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly emphasize the right of the Palestinian people to establish a viable and independent State, the need for Israel to withdraw from the territories occupied in 1967 and respect the status and character of Jerusalem, and the illegality of all of Israel's administrative and legal measures, including the confiscation of land and the construction of settlements. Yet, the lives of the Palestinian people are unchanged and the suffering of the Palestinians, due to displacement, the siege, starvation, the imposition of checkpoints and border crossings and the lack of access and movement, continues.

The Palestinian Authority has demonstrated its sincere willingness to achieve peace. It has taken a positive part in all negotiations and has honoured all its commitments — proof that it is a true partner for peace. Yet Israel has countered this willingness with procrastination and has continued its oppressive practices aimed at compelling the Palestinian people to give in.

All United Nations recent reports and all the hearings of the Human Rights Council and its June and July investigation into the incidents in Gaza have documented Israel's practice of deliberately targeting innocent Palestinian civilians. Testimony to that effect has been given by some Israeli soldiers. Despite the passage of six months since the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), the Palestinians are still awaiting the full implementation of that resolution.

As regards Jerusalem, Israel continues its efforts to Judaize the Holy City in order to undermine its historical and religious nature as a Holy City which represents coexistence and convergence among all sacred religions.

The serious and tragic situation in the Middle East requires the international community and the Security Council to make intensive efforts to compel Israel to resume the negotiations from the point at which they were halted and to take practical and tangible steps commensurate with the gravity of the situation. Chief among these is the cessation of settlement activity, which runs counter to all international resolutions and to the commitments undertaken by Israel under the Road Map.

As for the Arab side, it has continued to emphasize its political will to achieve comprehensive peace. It has put forward the Arab Peace Initiative, which is serious and practical, offering a comprehensive vision for the Middle East based on coexistence, good-neighbourliness and mutual cooperation.

The Kingdom of Morocco appreciates the principled position expressed by the new United States Administration vis-à-vis the two-State solution and the necessity of putting an end to the settlements. We also appreciate Washington's repeated endeavours to urge all States to return to the negotiating table.

In that connection, we salute the positive position enunciated by the Quartet at its joint meeting last month with the League of Arab States Follow-up

Committee on the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative.

His Majesty the King of Morocco, Chairman of the Al-Quds Committee, believes in peaceful negotiations and dialogue as the best means to achieve peaceful coexistence and peace. He continues to support this vision and to support efforts to achieve the creation of an independent Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital.

In a few weeks the world will mark the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. That will be an opportunity to recall the injustice and the problems to which the Palestinians have been subjected. It is time for the international community to shoulder its responsibility towards the Palestinian people with a view to achieving a comprehensive and just peace agreement and settlement — for which all people of the region yearn.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Ms. Espinosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): As this is the first time my country is speaking under your presidency, I would like to extend to you, Sir, the congratulations of Ecuador and our support in your leadership of the work of the Council this month.

We would also like to thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his complete briefing on the situation in Palestine and in the Middle East. My delegation associates itself with the statement made by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The position of Ecuador on the Palestinian question is well known to the entire international community, but we cannot fail to speak out whenever necessary to condemn the serious humanitarian and security situation to which the Palestinian civilian population continues to be subjected as a direct consequence of Israel's aggression and its occupation of the Palestinian territory.

It is regrettable to note that almost seven months since the most recent massive Israeli intervention in Gaza and despite the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) and the subsequent adoption of resolutions by the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council, there still has not been "an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza" (*resolution 1860 (2009), para. 1*) or "the unimpeded provision and distribution ... of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment" (*para. 2*). Nor have there been any specific sanctions as a result of investigations carried out by competent United Nations bodies into "the grave human rights violations committed in the occupied Palestine territories", especially during last January's attacks.

More than half a year has passed, and yet there continues to be a border blockade on the provision of humanitarian assistance, food, medicine, fuel and construction material. There is also an ongoing ban on the free movement of civilians, many of them women and children or sick people. There has also been selective destruction of public and private property, which has exacerbated the emergency humanitarian situation which has never ceased in the Gaza Strip, as recognized by specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations present in the region.

That is why, on behalf of the President of the Republic of Ecuador, Rafael Correa Delgado, I wish to reiterate the solidarity of the Ecuadorian Government and people with all the innocent victims of the ongoing Israeli aggression and, at the same time, to urgently appeal to Council members to immediately resolve the humanitarian crisis and resume the search for an enduring solution and a lasting peace in the region, through the full implementation of all relevant Security Council resolutions, including those I mentioned earlier.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ecuador advocates the peaceful solution of international disputes and conflicts and emphatically rejects the threat or the use of force as a mechanism to resolve them. Therefore, Ecuador believes that any comprehensive solution that will make it possible to achieve and maintain a lasting peace in the Middle East cannot be reached by military means, but only through ongoing dialogue, the strictest respect for international law, including international human rights law and international humanitarian law, and, above all, a true commitment to non-aggression and reconciliation that includes Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with East Jerusalem as its capital.

Regrettably, in recent weeks, the world has seen that the efforts of the Quartet on Middle East negotiations, particularly during its most recent meeting, held in Trieste on 26 June, in seeking a lasting peace with the recognition of two independent States, have in no way been echoed in the State of Israel. On the contrary, we have heard the Israeli authorities insist on their plans for settlements on Palestinian territory and close the door to the possibility for a future space for the establishment of a Palestinian State in their customary arrogance towards and isolation from the international community.

My country believes that, without prejudice to the aforementioned efforts and the noteworthy initiatives of Egypt and the League of Arab States and the statements in other forums, such as the Group of Eight it is primarily the responsibility of this Organization to seek and implement all the measures provided for in the United Nations Charter to pressure the occupying Power, Israel, to stop violating existing international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law.

That responsibility must be shouldered by the entire international community through coordinated actions in different multilateral and bilateral organs and bodies towards building a lasting peace not only for the benefit of the peoples of Palestine and Israel, but for the whole region. My country is ready to offer its ongoing support for such actions.

On the broader issue, I would also like to say how pleased my Government is with the progress in the diplomatic negotiations with Syria and Lebanon and with the progressive establishment of security in the latter country. We trust that the timely formation of a new Government that represents all the communities in that country will strengthen it.

Lastly, I am pleased to express my Government's support for the strengthening of the Arab Peace Initiative and the appeal to all parties to the conflict to respect their commitments under the Road Map, while reiterating that any comprehensive solution must sooner or later include dialogue and direct negotiation between Israel and Palestine.

The victims of the serious humanitarian situation in Palestine deserve that the United Nations and the Security Council and all its members shoulder their responsibility and take the action necessary to lay the foundations for the creation of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital, the restoration of lasting peace and security in the Middle East, and full enjoyment by all inhabitants, irrespective of their nationality, of their fundamental rights.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Cuba.

Mrs. Pino Rivero (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): The delegation of Cuba endorses the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The situation in the Middle East resulting from the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territory and other Arab territories, which has continued since 1967, remains a matter of great concern not only to the region, but also to the entire international community.

Cuba regrets the lack of progress, despite the increasing international efforts and the resumption of the peace process in late November 2007, in addressing the main issues and in pursuing the key positions on the Palestinian question. We would also like to express our great concern at the serious deterioration in the situation and in the critical political, economic, social, humanitarian and security conditions in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, owing to the ongoing illegal policies and practices by Israel, the occupying Power.

Israel must immediately cease military aggression against the Palestinian people. Our delegation underscores the importance of achieving a permanent ceasefire starting in the Gaza Strip and extending to the West Bank, and expresses its support for Egypt's efforts in that regard.

We reiterate our condemnation of Israel's inhumane and illegal closure and blockade of the Gaza Strip, which has resulted in the imprisonment of the entire Palestinian civilian population by obstructing its freedom of movement, including that of the sick, students and humanitarian personnel; by hampering access to humanitarian aid and basic necessities, such as food, medicines, fuel, electricity and building materials; and by blocking all trade.

It is time for Israel to cease such illegal practices against the Palestinian people and permanently put an end to its illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip, allowing the immediate and permanent opening of all border crossings in the Gaza Strip, and permitting movement

to and from the territory of the persons and goods needed to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and to effect the immediate reconstruction and economic recovery of the Palestinian people.

The situation in the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory continues to be a source of great concern. In that regard, we condemn Israel's ongoing intensive campaign to establish settlements, including the confiscation of vast tracts of land; the construction and expansion of illegal settlements and their outposts and infrastructure; the transfer of additional Israeli settlers; the building of the wall; the demolition of homes; the excavations; and the imposition of arbitrary and racist restrictions on residency and movement through a system of permits and checkpoints throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, especially in and around occupied East Jerusalem. Such policies and measures by Israel are grave violations of international law and a flagrant challenge to the United Nations resolutions and the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

We emphasize the incompatibility of peace process negotiations with such illegal settlement activities, which are clearly aimed at illegally acquiring and, de facto, annexing more Palestinian territory and forcibly imposing a unilateral solution. We harbour the hope that the ongoing efforts to achieve reconciliation and unity in Palestine will soon reach their objectives, for the benefit of the Palestinian people.

We reiterate our call for the prompt solution of the issue of the Sheba'a farms in full respect for Lebanese territorial integrity, as stipulated by resolution 1701 (2006). We urge all parties to cooperate in protecting the sovereign rights of Lebanon in that area, and we note the efforts of the Secretary-General in that regard.

Similarly, we reaffirm that any measure or action taken, or to be taken, by Israel, the occupying Power, aimed at changing the legal, physical or demographic condition or the institutional infrastructure of the occupied Syrian Golan, and any measures by Israel to impose its jurisdiction and administration in that territory, have no legal effect. It is now time for Israel to comply with resolution 497 (1981) and to withdraw completely from the occupied Syrian Golan to the borders of 4 June 1967.

Cuba will continue to support and to contribute actively in every possible sphere to achieving a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid terms of reference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): I shall deliver this statement on behalf of our Permanent Representative, but before doing so I wish to thank you, Mr. President, for convening today's meeting, which is of vital importance. I also wish to convey my appreciation to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his very informative and comprehensive briefing this morning.

I also wish to state that the Bangladesh delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt in his capacity as Chairman of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, I also wish briefly to make certain points that Bangladesh believes to be of importance.

Bangladesh has always been committed to the cause of Palestine. It maintains affirmed solidarity with the Palestinian people in their just and legitimate struggle for self-determination and statehood. Our solidarity with the Palestinian cause and support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are constant and unwavering. Bangladesh reiterates its long-standing position that the continued occupation of Palestine is the root cause of violence, unrest and destabilization in the region. The people of Palestine are being denied their fundamental rights to self-determination and to live freely in their own land. We believe that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital is the only sustainable solution to this long-lasting conflict.

Bangladesh condemns Israel's illegal settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territory, which undermines the Palestinian territory's unity and contiguity. All concerned parties should call for an immediate freeze on the expansion of Jewish settlements, as well as for the dismantling of the existing ones in the occupied territories.

Another major cause for concern is the unilateral blockade imposed by the Israeli authorities. Such repressive measures affect the lives and livelihoods of the Palestinian people. Consequently, their social, political and economic institution-building stands crippled. Such injustice cannot be allowed to continue and must be rolled back in the interest of the free movement of people and access by the humanitarian agencies. It is necessary to rededicate ourselves to the Palestinian cause of self-determination and statehood, and to work together to bring that aspiration to fruition.

While Bangladesh welcomes the various initiatives and efforts undertaken on Palestine to date, it emphasizes that the lack of progress on those initiatives should not deter us from renewing our commitment to and intensifying our efforts for a permanent solution to this long-standing issue. We need to seize every opportunity and take measures to ensure that Israel and its patrons comply with the relevant United Nations resolutions on Palestine. All concerned must comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, must undertake the necessary measures to ensure the full and effective implementation of that resolution.

The continuous defiance and blatant disregard of international law demonstrated by the occupying Power should be addressed by all concerned, including the Security Council and the international community. Effective measures should be taken to oblige the occupants to comply with international law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Road Map. We should demand that the Quartet assume greater responsibility in steering the peace process and in ensuring Israel's compliance with all relevant Security Council resolutions and principles of international law.

As we continue to reiterate and strengthen our support for the Palestinian issue and for the long-standing human tragedy associated with it, we believe that the unity and solidarity of the Palestinians need to be preserved by all means. Otherwise, the whole effort to achieve the goal of founding an independent Palestinian State will be delayed.

Bangladesh firmly believes that a comprehensive and just settlement is the key to peace in the Middle East. The relevant United Nations resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Middle East Road Map can be viewed as the guiding principles in this regard. Bangladesh hopes that all parties involved will take a pragmatic approach to this issue for the early implementation of the Road Map for Peace in the Middle East.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Tunisia.

Mr. Jomaa (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I wish to extend to you, Sir, and through you the brotherly Republic of Uganda, our sincere congratulations on your presidency of the Security Council this month. We pay tribute to your leadership and your efforts to crown the Council's various deliberations with success.

I also wish to congratulate the delegation of brotherly Turkey on its able and successful presidency of the work of the Security Council last month.

This open debate of the Security Council provides Member States with the opportunity to address the very important issue of the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. It is an opportunity to recall the historical responsibility of the United Nations vis-à-vis the Palestinian question and for Member States to give momentum to efforts aimed at moving the peace process forward and reinvigorating the recent endeavours of many influential actors to resolve differences in the region.

Under the leadership of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia attaches great importance to the question of Palestine.

His Excellency the President has consistently affirmed our unswerving position on the Palestinian question and has always stressed that, as in the past, we shall always stand alongside the brotherly Palestinian people in its just struggle to retrieve its legitimate national rights and establish an independent State of its own on its national soil. We also support the strategic choice of peace and have always contributed to every effort intended to find a just, comprehensive and lasting settlement of the Palestinian question in conformity with resolutions of international legitimacy and the terms of reference of the peace process, including the Arab Peace Initiative.

In that connection, we welcome the positive position set out by the new United States Administration regarding the peace process and the vision of two States living side by side in peace. We

call again on the international community and on the Quartet to intensify their efforts and resume negotiations on the basis of resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative, which, with international support, has now become one of the principal terms of reference for peace.

There is international consensus that peace must inevitably be brought about through negotiations. This requires coordinated efforts by the entire international community to overcome the obstacles in the way of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. We have been encouraged by some hopeful indications that the Middle East impasse will soon come to an end, but we are duty-bound to draw attention to the ongoing dangerous Israeli practices towards the brotherly Palestinian people. Those practices deprive the Palestinian people of the legitimate rights they are guaranteed by all relevant international instruments and resolutions. The continuing settlement policy and the imposition of a blockade on the Palestinian people hinder efforts towards a settlement and towards peace. They harden the obstacles preventing the resumption of negotiations, which must be built on trust and on the commitment of all parties to honour their commitments under existing agreements and the principal terms of reference.

In discussing the situation in the Middle East we cannot fail to recall the need for Israel to withdraw from all occupied Syrian and Lebanese territories, in order to attain the goal of a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East crisis in all its aspects in a manner that will bring security and stability to all the peoples of the region.

Today's debate should provide an opportunity for us to work in a more holistic and effective manner to address everything that endangers peace in the Middle East, in particular in the wake of Israel's oppressive aggression against Gaza, which caused vast loss of life and the destruction of vital Palestinian infrastructure and institutions. It also provides an opportunity for Member States to contribute to peace efforts, work to achieve a settlement and put an end to the pain of a people that has been suffering for more than six decades and has been deprived of its fundamental rights.

We look forward to the day when the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people and the hopes of the international community will give rise to tangible efforts to pave the way to peace, independence and sovereignty for the Palestinian people. This will eliminate tension in the region and lead to a new era of security, stability and advancement.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Nicaragua.

Mr. Hermida Castillo (Nicaragua) (*spoke in Spanish*): We congratulate you, Sir, and your country on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council. We thank Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing this morning.

The right of conquest is viewed as an offence to human rights, to the sovereignty and self-determination of peoples and to the norms governing relations among nations, including the inadmissibility of the seizure of territory by force. We thought it had been eliminated with the end of the age of colonization by the Western Powers and with the drafting of the Charter of the United Nations, but in the twenty-first century it appears still to be enjoyed by Israel in the Middle East. A colonial Power had only to put a handful of men on the territory to be colonized to view itself as endowed with the right of conquest — a right that, even before it was actually exercised, made that Power the master of the territory to be conquered. The natural inhabitants of the territory, once the owners of their ancestral lands, came to live in utterly precarious, depressing and miserable conditions — if they survived the conquering Power's genocide.

That is the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. The Israeli violations that flout the very basis of the modern-day international legal order are a fundamental transgression of the basic norms of international law, which possess the character of *jus cogens*. These basic norms are the legitimate concern of the entire community of nations; all peoples can appeal to them and have an interest in safeguarding them and ensuring their implementation.

Early last week, in defiance of the international community and in particular the Security Council, the Government of Israel asserted a unified Jerusalem as the capital of the Jewish people and of the State of Israel and that its sovereignty in Jerusalem was not a matter for discussion.

During the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel seized East Jerusalem as war booty. Then, in 1980, it adopted

national legislation encompassing the eastern and western parts of the city, proclaiming this as its eternal and invisible capital. That measure is illegal under resolution 478 (1980) and illegal in the eyes of the General Assembly, which has reaffirmed that all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, that have altered or purported to alter the character, legal status and demographic composition of Jerusalem are null and void and have no validity whatsoever, in particular the so-called Basic Law on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and that such measures must be reversed.

Nonetheless, and in spite of United Nations resolutions declaring the illegality of Israeli actions in East Jerusalem, tension has continued to rise after more than 40 years of occupation. This is a result of Israel's destructive and provocative policies and actions, through its settlement campaign throughout the occupied Palestinian territory. This is under way primarily in Jerusalem, where Israel continues fiercely to wage its final conquest and colonization of the city and the neighbouring areas. The isolation of Jerusalem from the remainder of the occupied Palestinian territory, the Judaization of the city and the destruction of its original demographic composition and its historical and cultural heritage, along with the expansion of illegal settlements at an unprecedented pace, constitute an ongoing violation of articles 49 and 53 of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

The continued occupation has further exacerbated the situation of the Palestinian people, which has already been precarious since the construction of the wall that has dismembered its territory, isolated its various areas and separated East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory. This has led to a serious physical, economic, cultural and social disaster.

The building of the wall was the subject of an International Court of Justice advisory opinion of 9 July 2004, which stated that the wall being erected by Israel, the occupying Power, in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and its environs, was counter to international law and that Israel was obligated to end its non-compliance with international law and to immediately halt construction work on the wall and to immediately dismantle existing structures.

With regard to the Gaza Strip, there has been no progress since the end of the Israeli military operation seven months ago. The inhabitants of Gaza cannot rebuild their lives. The majority of the population of 1.5 million is having extreme difficulty making it to the end of the month. Seriously ill people are suffering because they cannot access medical treatment. Many children are suffering from serious psychological problems. Civilians whose homes and possessions were destroyed during the conflict cannot recover. In short, the blockade imposed by Israel three years ago remains unchanged and the United Nations does nothing. Poverty in Gaza is directly related to the blockade.

In order to prevent the misery from increasing with every passing day and to enable people to rebuild their lives, the restrictions on movement and goods must be lifted. The uninterrupted occupation of Arab territories by Israel in implementation of its policy of conquest and expansion is an ongoing violation of the United Nations Charter. Unfortunately, the Security Council has adopted no effective measures to put an end to Israel's illegal actions. It has permitted continued violation of the status of the city and its residents and helped dim the prospects for peace, which is essential to the future of Jerusalem. An agreement between both interested parties that recognizes East Jerusalem as the capital of the new Palestinian State is essential to achieving lasting peace.

We must underscore the extreme urgency of these matters and once again reiterate that the Council, on the basis of its own as yet unimplemented resolutions, must comply with its obligations under the Charter and act against the illegal actions of the occupying Power, Israel, in the occupied Palestinian territories.

We hope that the day is coming when Israeli actions with regard to Jerusalem will respect and recognize the etymology of the city, whose name derives from the Hebrew for "house of peace" or from the Arabic, Al-Quds, which means "sacred site". Nicaragua calls for a politically just solution to the Palestinian problem based on numerous United Nations resolutions, including the resolution establishing the right of return for Palestinian refugees and those resolutions calling for Israel's withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with the principle of land for peace, established at the Madrid conference and in the Arab Peace Initiative, which will allow for the creation of an independent Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital.

There is universal consensus that the Palestinian people must not remain under occupation. Israeli colonialism must end. The Palestinian people must exercise their inalienable rights and the State of Palestine must be established immediately. We reiterate that only with the establishment of the two States, Palestine and Israel, and with an end to Israeli occupation of occupied Arab territories will there be just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Once again, Nicaragua wishes to express its support for and solidarity with the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Government of Lebanon as they seek territorial unity for their respective States and consequently an end to Israeli occupation in those territories.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Norway.

Ms. Enge (Norway): Norway fully supports the current efforts to resume final status negotiations. A political framework for a two-State solution based on the Road Map is necessary in order to mobilize broad international support for Palestinian State-building. Without such a political framework, we fear that international support may be eroded. The time has come to hold the parties to account and to demand that they honour their Road Map commitments and other key obligations. Without tangible improvements on the ground, the work of the negotiators will be undermined and public support for the two-State solution will evaporate.

Norway strongly supports Egyptian efforts to heal the internal division among Palestinians. We commend Egypt for its patience and hard work in trying to find a political solution that will make it possible for a legitimate Palestinian Government to be in full control of both Gaza and the West Bank.

The situation of the civilian population of the Gaza Strip is unacceptable. In January this year, the Security Council called on Member States to support international efforts to alleviate the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza, including through the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. For life in Gaza to improve, the civilian population must be allowed freedom of movement. For the economy in Gaza to revive, the import and export of goods must be restored. Norway urges the Government of Israel to reconsider its policy towards the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, Norway demands an end to the indiscriminate firing of rockets and mortars against Israeli civilians and the immediate release of Corporal Gilad Shalit; now in his third year of captivity.

In view of Norway's role as chair of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee — the international donor group supporting the Palestinian Authority — let me make a few observations focused on the connection between the political and the economic aspects of the peace process.

First, we must all act on our long-held understanding that economic progress in the Palestinian territory is essential to bringing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to an end. The institutions of the Palestinian Authority are the foundation of the future Palestinian State. Through timely budgetary support from major donors, Prime Minister Salam Fayyad has staved off the impending crisis for now. However, a considerable remaining gap must be filled to enable the Palestinian Authority to pay salaries and utility bills throughout the year. Western and Arab donors alike should therefore honour their pledges from the donor conferences of Paris and Sharm el-Sheikh.

On the other hand — and this is my second point — the parties are ill-advised to take the donors for granted. The international donor community's support to the Palestinian Territory is in essence political, not humanitarian. Our aim is to facilitate the establishment of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State, living side by side in peace and security with Israel. Without the political endgame in clear view, donor commitment at current levels can hardly be sustained.

Third, donor dependency is not a solution, while private value generation is. Let us not forget that, 10 years ago, the Palestinian Authority ran a budget surplus. Israel must lift restrictions on commercial flows to, from and within all parts of the Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip. The many roadblocks that literally stand in the way of economic development must be removed, in accordance with Israel's international obligations.

Finally, let me conclude by turning to the work of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. The June meeting in Oslo took stock of the grave economic situation of the Palestinian Authority. The meeting sought to identify measures that would underpin sustainable economic growth in the Palestinian territory, including the Gaza Strip, and mobilize much-needed budget support for

the Palestinian Authority. The next Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting will take place in New York in the margins of the opening of the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly.

One of the objectives of the upcoming Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in New York is to provide Prime Minister Fayyad with an opportunity to lay out his recently announced vision for establishing a Palestinian State within a two-year time frame. Norway is pledging its full support for Prime Minister Fayyad's vision. We expect Prime Minister Fayyad to use the occasion in New York to explain to donors in some detail how they can help turn his vision into reality.

We, the donors, in close coordination with the Security Council and the Middle East Quartet, should be prepared to act on these proposals, mindful that the next couple of years may be our last chance in the foreseeable future to salvage the two-State solution.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Mr. Al Habib (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to begin, Sir, by joining other speakers in congratulating you on the skill with which you have presided over the Security Council this month and in thanking you for having convened this timely open debate. I also wish to extend our thanks to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for his briefing to the Council this morning.

Like every single other day in the past six decades, the period under review has been witness to an unabated bloody campaign and racist and aggressive policies and practices by the Israeli regime. The defenceless Palestinians continue to be subject to some of the most vicious measures ever employed and to abhorrent war crimes perpetrated by Israelis, as a result of which dozens more Palestinian civilians have been killed or injured and more and more have been displaced.

In violation of the most basic principles of international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law, and in clear contempt for and defiance of the unambiguous calls made by the international community, the Israeli regime's illegal colonization of the occupied Palestinian territories continues, the demolition of Palestinian homes and properties and confiscation of Palestinian lands have intensified, and the construction of settlements and settlement infrastructure, as well as the transfer of Israeli settlers, have increased.

At the same time, and despite United Nations resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, the construction of the illegal apartheid wall is continuing unabated, bringing more and more brutal damage to Palestinian lives, livelihoods, lands, freedom and property. The Palestinian people are suffering from daily humiliation, hardships and deprivation caused by criminal and racist Israeli policies and practices, including the continued existence of at least 613 checkpoints and other obstacles to the movement of persons and goods throughout the West Bank.

One and a half million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip are subject to collective punishment and are facing an unprecedented humanitarian crisis as they are deprived of their most basic goods and health care services as a result of the inhumane Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Continuation of this brutal siege has not only worsened the already dire humanitarian crisis in the Strip but also made reconstruction in the wake of the devastation caused by the Israeli aggression against Gaza a few months ago — the rebuilding of even the most urgently needed basic infrastructures — impossible.

The aggressive and expansionist Israeli policies and practices against Lebanon and the occupied Syrian Golan have also continued. In flagrant violation of the fundamental principles of international law, the Geneva Conventions and Security Council resolutions, the Israeli regime insists on its illegal occupation of the occupied Syrian Golan, on its criminal settlement activities and on the alteration of the legal, physical and demographic status of the occupied Syrian Golan.

It also continues its aggression against Lebanon through its continued occupation of Lebanese territories, violation of Lebanese airspace on a daily basis and the deployment of spy networks in the country.

The reports of the Secretary-General on resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006) note that violations of Lebanese airspace, and defiance of the provisions of Council resolutions, including resolution 1701 (2006), have become a matter of routine policy

by the Israeli regime. Statements by officials of the Israeli regime, together with the policies and practices of that regime in the past several months, have yet again shown that it has no belief in, or respect for, peace. Under the slogan of peace, it only tries to mislead others in order to buy time and pave the ground to further pursue its aggressive policies.

Israel's intransigent insistence on the pursuit of its illegal campaign of colonization and settlement construction in the occupied Palestinian territories on the absurd and false pretext of so-called natural growth shows its vicious intention to continue to expand its occupation of the Palestinian territories rather than heed the international community's calls to stop it.

The remarks by the Speaker of the Israeli Knesset just a few days ago, in which he called for the expansion of the territories occupied by the Israeli regime to include territories on the east bank of the Jordan river, displayed once again the dangerous, aggressive and expansionist policies that this regime harbours for the entire region.

The international community's failure to stop the Israeli crimes against Palestinians and others in the region has only emboldened the regime to continue with its inhumane and criminal behaviour. Concrete and resolute measures by the international community and by the Security Council are imperative in order to stop this vicious cycle of Israeli aggression and violence.

The time to act is now. The international community should not continue to turn a blind eye to these abhorrent crimes. There should be no doubt that occupation lies at the centre of the Palestinian conflict and overall tension and instability in the Middle East. Unless this principal cause of conflict is effectively addressed, the crisis will never subside.

We expect the Security Council, in particular, to shoulder its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security by putting an end to the Israeli regime's inhumane and aggressive acts. It should force the Israeli regime to completely and permanently cease settlement activities, lift the blockade against the Gaza Strip, cease and desist from its inhumane violation of Palestinian rights and end its occupation of all Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian territories.

I wish to conclude by putting on record that my delegation rejects the baseless and absurd allegations made against my country by the representative of the Israeli regime in the Council today. This is another tired attempt by the Zionist regime to divert attention from that regime's war crimes and crimes against humanity. This wicked ploy has not worked in the past; nor will it work in the future. It is preposterous that a criminal regime that possesses nuclear weapons, is not a party to the international treaties on weapons of mass destruction and feeds on terrorism and bloodshed can accuse others groundlessly. Nothing could be more dangerous for the world and the region than nuclear weapons in the hands of the terrorist Israeli regime, which has proved to have no respect for any human right or any international regulation. This danger should be countered resolutely and urgently.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Pakistan.

Mr. Haroon (Pakistan): Mr. President, on behalf of the Pakistan delegation, I would like to congratulate you on your skilful steering of the Council's work during this month. Let me also thank the Assistant Secretary-General for his briefing and update on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, which is one of the most pressing and long-standing issues on the agenda of the Security Council and the United Nations.

The statements that we have heard in this debate reaffirm the fundamental interest of the international community in a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict leading to a just and lasting settlement of the core issue of Palestine. With regard to the latter, there is a clear sense that the current state of affairs remains untenable. The situation of the Palestinian people remains intolerable. Their legitimate aspirations for freedom and dignity and an independent and sovereign State of their own can no longer be held back. While we have to address the immediate human rights, social and economic and humanitarian concerns and needs of the oppressed and besieged Palestinian people in the occupied territories, we must also create the conditions for an early resumption of negotiations and also avoid the risk of renewed conflict and bloodshed, which have so often affected lives for many generations.

While little optimism is offered by the political developments in the region and the continuing grave

situation on the ground, the international consensus and the call for peace are growing stronger in the new global political scenario. The priority accorded to this issue by the United States Administration — particularly the commitment of President Obama to personally pursue a peaceful resolution of the conflict and his call on all sides to live up to their obligations — has been welcomed by all.

I think there is full recognition of the fact that a just settlement of the Palestinian question is central to ending the cycle of suspicion and discord that has undermined peace and security in the Middle East and has also strained the relations between neighbours in this land. The question is how to convert this international consensus into credible action that will bring to fruition this arduous search for peace. What we need is a transformative shift — not only in the political process, but also in the situation on the ground, since they remain interdependent.

There is no option but to return to the negotiating table. The futility of the use of disproportionate force and unilateral action is beyond doubt. Efforts to create new facts on the ground that prejudice the outcome of negotiations should not be recognized; nor should they be acceptable to the international community. We should also learn from the half-hearted attempts, unfulfilled promises and aborted peace processes that we have so often witnessed in the past. Greater political will is required to bring the parties together and help them engage in a sustained negotiation process — in good faith and without preconditions — aimed at achieving, within a reasonable time frame, a comprehensive agreement on all permanent status issues.

But any progress will be difficult without the full implementation by the parties of their respective obligations in support of the peace process. We believe that the fulfilment of commitments by the parties is in their own interest and that it should be perceived not as a sign of weakness, but as a measure of strength and confidence in the peace efforts.

In accordance with its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, the Security Council has a crucial role in supporting the efforts for renewed negotiations and their early successful conclusion. I believe that this is an ideal opportunity for the Council to ensure respect for and the implementation of its resolutions and to restore its own relevance, credibility and legitimacy by giving a serious push to the resolution of this issue. If there is to be a comprehensive peace in the region, it is also essential to make parallel progress on the Israel-Syria and Israel-Lebanon fronts through the conclusion of peace agreements, particularly those under the Road Map.

Regrettably, we are now witnessing the contrary. Some of the essential confidence-building measures are nowhere in sight. The construction of the illegal separation wall continues unabated. The suffocating complex of roadblocks and permits remains in place, disrupting and adding misery to the everyday lives of the Palestinian people. Thousands of Palestinians, including women and children, remain incarcerated in Israeli prisons. The inhumane blockade continues in the Gaza Strip, where the people are still struggling to come to terms with the destruction and tremendous human suffering recently inflicted as a result of aggression, for which, unfortunately, there is no accountability. Israel continues with impunity its illegal settlement activities in the West Bank, including in and around East Jerusalem. That is not acceptable.

Given the serious implications of all this for the peace process, the international community is right in calling on Israel to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001 and to refrain from provocative actions in and around East Jerusalem, including home demolitions and evictions. Obliging Israel to comply with its commitments remains a real test of the international community's seriousness and commitment vis-à-vis equitable solution.

The root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the occupation of Arab lands. In its recent statement, the Quartet rightly underscored that the only viable solution to this conflict is one that ends the occupation. That is the ultimate objective that has eluded us here in the Security Council so far, but it should not be allowed to escape us any longer. The framework for peace is there in all the relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003); in the Madrid terms of reference, including the principle of land for peace; in the Road Map; and in the Arab Peace Initiative. All are available to us. The international consensus and requirement for peace are also very clearly there on our part. We must all act now to achieve what has been awaiting us and what,

inarguably, is in the interest of our world and, above all, in the interest of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Pakistan's full support for that objective and our strong commitment to the realization of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine on the basis of the pre-1967 borders.

The President: I now call on the representative of South Africa.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): We welcome the opportunity to participate and share our views in this debate on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. South Africa aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Egypt on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

In recent weeks and months, there has been some encouraging movement towards reigniting the search for peace in the Middle East. The successful elections in Lebanon and the ongoing regional initiatives of the League of Arab States to promote and achieve intra-Palestinian reconciliation and unity have been positive developments; so was the address by the United States President, Mr. Barack Obama, on 4 June 2009. Recent meetings between senior United States officials and leaders in the Middle East aimed at promoting peace also raised hopes in the Middle East and, indeed, beyond.

However, those encouraging developments have yet to be translated into progress on the ground, especially in the occupied Palestinian territory. The reality is that Palestinians continue to live under an occupation that they have endured for decades. They face daily hardships, compounded by the existence of many checkpoints that restrict their movement and access. The violent incursions by the Israeli army into Palestinian areas continue unabated, while Israeli settlements and the separation wall expand in spite of international condemnation.

South Africa condemns the continuing Israeli blockade and the ongoing construction and expansion of illegal settlements. We reiterate our call to Israel to immediately cease the building and expansion of settlements in the West Bank. The intensified home demolition programme on the part of Israel that we are currently witnessing in East Jerusalem constitutes a serious violation of international law, as definitively clarified in the 9 July 2004 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice.

My delegation continues to be concerned about Israel's construction of the separation wall in the West Bank. The Israeli Government has pursued the construction of the separation wall, which cuts through the West Bank, confiscating large chunks of Palestinian farmland, residences and commercial property for this purpose. Israel's building of the separation wall runs counter to the will of the international community.

South Africa has consistently demonstrated our support for the rights of the Palestinian people to a State of their own. South Africa's clear and unwavering support for the establishment of a viable Palestinian State is based on its firm belief that only a two-State solution can bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

We believe that a vision of peaceful coexistence between Israelis and Palestinians, based on the creation of a Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders, is the only sustainable solution to this conflict. We remain convinced that negotiation is the only way to end the conflict and to bring about an end to the occupation of the Palestinian and other Arab territories.

The Security Council should not neglect its Charter-mandated responsibility to assist in the attainment of peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its failure to find a lasting solution to this crisis is a failure to give hope to the people of Palestine. We therefore urge the Council, in line with its Charter obligations, to act decisively and take action to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

For its part, South Africa continues to support a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in line with international resolutions and initiatives, such as Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), and the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for the establishment of a Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with the State of Israel within internationally recognized and secure borders.

South Africa welcomes the holding of successful parliamentary elections in Lebanon early last month. We commend the Government of Lebanon for its continuous efforts to stabilize the country in the aftermath of Israel's aggression and violation of its

territorial integrity and sovereignty. We are also concerned about the explosions that occurred on 14 July 2009. In that regard, we call on all parties to fully implement resolution 1701 (2006).

In conclusion, South Africa will continue to support and contribute to all efforts aimed at achieving a lasting peace in the Middle East, based on all relevant United Nations resolutions, the terms of reference of the Madrid Conference, the principle of land for peace, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Road Map.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Qatar.

Mr. Al-Shafi (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Sir, I would like to congratulate you on your assumption of the presidency of the Council for this month and to thank you for convening this meeting on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question, in the form of an open debate, which gives us an opportunity to discuss the issue, which is of paramount importance for security and development in our region and throughout the world. I also express our appreciation to Mr. Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, for the briefing that he presented on behalf of the Secretary-General.

We continue to witness the effects of the recent Israeli military aggression on Gaza, the destruction and damage that it left behind and the deteriorating humanitarian situation resulting from the Israeli army's use of disproportionate force and banned weapons such as white phosphorus in heavily crowded residential areas, as well as its targeting of houses of worship, schools, hospitals and United Nations facilities. This is considered a war crime, and those responsible for it must be held accountable. Moreover, the new Israeli Government is moving ahead with its predecessor's obstruction of access to humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials.

These extremely serious practices are targeting the population at a time when the international community's concern for the security of civilians is heightened. The Security Council periodically discusses the issue of the protection of civilians in armed conflict and a few days ago the General Assembly began its consideration of the responsibility to protect. Moreover, international organizations and non-governmental organizations continue to focus on the need to protect the human rights and human security of civilians throughout the world.

Despite all this, the suffering of Palestinian civilians as a result of Israeli occupation and illegal Israeli practices not only continues but is also being intensified. Human conscience requires that we expose the truth about all human rights violations committed during that armed conflict. We must ensure that the perpetrators of these crimes do not go unpunished.

We await the report of the fact-finding mission appointed by the Human Rights Council to investigate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law perpetrated in Gaza. The Israeli Government must cooperate with that independent international mission and with its Chairman, who is known for his impartiality. The Secretary-General has briefed the Security Council on a summary of the fact-finding team's report. This team was formed over two months ago, and we are still waiting for the Council to take concrete measures based on the team's recommendations.

Israeli authorities continue to build the separation wall and to expand their settlements in a quest to, de facto, annex more Palestinian territories. This threatens the contiguity of Palestinian territories, which is considered a basic requirement for a Palestinian State. This can therefore be considered as a deliberate act that aims to eliminate any chances of a permanent solution to the Palestinian situation and as a blow to international mediation efforts, especially those of the international Quartet.

The State of Qatar believes that the solution to the Palestinian issue lies in the establishment of two States, living side by side in peace. Qatar believes that the Israeli Government's attempts to expand settlements, especially those around East Jerusalem, undermine the chances of a two-State solution based on the 1967 borders. If the Israeli Government seeks to justify the expansion of its settlements by what it calls natural growth, then we stress that we categorically reject this concept, because settlement activity is illegal to begin with, and such growth is by no means natural. The general policy in Israel encourages settlement in occupied Palestinian territory, especially in East Jerusalem. It does so by offering Government assistance and incentives to encourage the transfer of Israeli civilian residents to Palestinian territory, in violation of international law.

Israel continues to violate Lebanon's sovereignty, in particular its airspace, on an almost daily basis. In addition, Israel continues to occupy some Lebanese territory and the Syrian Golan Heights. In that regard, we reiterate that Israel's decision to annex the Golan Heights is null and void. We stress the need to return the Golan to Syria and to return the remaining occupied Lebanese territory to Lebanon.

Just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region can be achieved only on the basis of the principle of land for peace, the terms of reference embodied in the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, and the Arab Peace Initiative. The latter was reaffirmed at the Doha summit of March 2009, which also noted that the continued offer of the Arab Initiative was contingent upon the Israeli side's acceptance of it. The new Israeli Government must therefore refrain from adopting extremist positions. It must take advantage of the genuine Arab desire to end the crisis in the Middle East.

In conclusion, my country's delegation reiterates the need to ensure the participation of all Palestinian factions so as to ensure the success of the peace efforts. Our Palestinian brothers must seriously endeavour to achieve national unity in the service of the Palestinian people.

The President: There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on the agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.45 p.m.